

# PICASSO, 1905-1906. FROM THE ROSE PERIOD TO THE OCHRES OF GÓSOL



ACROBAT AND YOUNG HARLEQUIN (PARIS, 1905)

OVER TWO MONTHS, THE PICASSO MUSEUM IN BARCELONA HAS AGGLUTINATED A PART OF THE WORK OF PABLO RUIZ PICASSO (MALAGA, 1881 - MOUGINS, PROVENCE, 1973) WHICH HAS CLOSE TIES WITH BARCELONA AND CATALONIA AND WHICH MARKED THE MOVE TO MODERNITY.

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THE HAREM (GÓSOL, 1906)

**T**he exhibition "Picasso, 1905-1906" has allowed an extension, albeit only a temporary one, of the permanent collections of the Picasso Museum in Barcelona. It consisted in fact of a compilation of the work which came immediately after Picasso's departure from Catalonia, in April 1904, at the end of his Blue Period. Through this exhibition, it has been possible to see the extent to which the artist's roots were fixed in the Catalan art of the end of the century. At the same time, the artistic effervescence of Paris and his contacts with what was to become the vanguard of European culture stimulated him and encouraged his ceaseless, determined search for a new and origi-

nal form of painting which was to lead to a decisive change in his artistic language.

The stylistic, iconographic and thematic changes that took place during this period (from the end of 1904 to the autumn of 1905) are analysed in depth in the course of the exhibition.

The coherence and fluidity of the transition from the Blue Period to the Rose Period is illustrated in a series of works in which he takes on various subjects which reach their peak during this year. One of the subjects he developed most successfully during 1905 was the family group, which had already featured prominently in the maternity pictures of the Blue Period. Also worth noting is

the treatment he gives to the female body—physically decrepit and shrunk-en, and, symbolically, anguished by the sufferings of life—, which recovers towards the end of 1904, as the woman takes a conscious pleasure in the care of her body before a companion who contemplates her with profound melancholy.

At the same time, the mannerist forms so characteristic of the Blue Period gradually gave way to very defined figures which led to the soft, ethereal figurations of the Rose Period.

The family groups in circus settings dominated the centre of the composition throughout 1905. Acrobats and harlequins absorbed the attention of the



artist, who was set on achieving a great painting, centred on the subject of a family of acrobats. This painting, whose definitive version was *Family of saltimbanques*, in the Washington National Gallery's Cheter Dale collection, did not form part of the exhibition since because of a condition of the donor it could not leave this museum.

Around this idea, the artist developed an extensive and copious production in which a new symbology surrounded his work: a more impersonal cosmos, in which it is easy to detect emotions and in which the marginalization and helplessness of the Blue Period give way to a subtle, melancholic feeling of incommunication and isolation, visible in the confrontations of harlequins which, in pairs or groups, show their ambiguous forms delicately drawn.

Works like *Harlequin's Family with Monkey*, *Acrobat* and *Young Harlequin* show how fertile and elaborate the production centering on this idea is, since, as Alfred Barr says in *Picasso. Fifty Years of His Art*, "masterpieces are not always as successful as smaller and less ambitious pieces".

One of the great successes of this exhibition was the idea of putting together the most significant works from the period he spent in Holland, in the summer of 1905, in the village of Schoorl. These were *The Three Dutchgirls* and *The Pretty Dutchgirl*, in which a radical change takes place in the conception of the exuberant forms and in the treatment of cleanly defined colours.

In the summer of 1906, Picasso started the shift to modernity, which was to lead to one of the legendary paintings of the history of the art of our century: *Les Femmes d'Alger*. What is so surprising is that this change took place when Picasso once more came into con-



TWO BROTHERS (GÓSOL, 1906)

tact with Catalonia during his stay in Gósol, in the summer of 1906. The purchase of a considerable number of pictures by Ambroise Vollard made it possible for Picasso and Fernand Olivier to spend part of the summer in this village in the Catalan Pyrenees, in the Berguedà region. During this visit, everything he had absorbed during the previous winter flowed together.

The look over his shoulder at the ancient world—which led to the appearance of a subject matter and a classical style that dominated the artist's work during the winter of 1906— and especially his previous reading of Ingres in Paris, gave rise during that spell in Gósol to archaistic figures in which the volumes of the forms are intensified, as happens in the picture *Two Brothers*.

In addition, the sobriety of the landscape of ochre tones accentuates the tendency to monochromy and adapts naturally to the schematization of the line and the simplification of the forms, which the artist had begun in his search for a new artistic language. Gósol did not only provide Picasso with the peace and quiet to digest and develop everything he had learnt until then. The village, the landscape and the inhabitants

became the centre of several compositions of that time, in a series of pictures and drawings in which the atmosphere of the village is faithfully reflected. This is the case of canvases like *Woman with Bread*, *Gósol Youth*, *Shepherd with Basket* and a whole series of still lifes depicting everyday objects, which demonstrate the artist's ties with his immediate surroundings.

The woman washing is one of the subjects which by virtue of the exhaustive treatment given to it reaches the level of a subgenre during this summer in Gósol. Fernande, naked or clothed, looking at herself in the mirror, combing her hair or washing, is the object of a number of compositions. This intense analysis of the figure of his companion is summed up in the canvas *The Harem*, in which Picasso establishes a dialogue between the classicism of Ingres, more precisely *Le bain turc*, and the archaistic forms of Iberian sculpture, whose reading was to lead him to new aesthetic conceptions. A detailed examination of this painting suggests a work of transition, which was eventually to lead him to *Les Femmes d'Alger*, of which it is an obvious forerunner.

What is clear, as Pierre Daix says, is that Gósol represents the beginning of the "great turn" in Picasso's painting, which was to be consolidated the following autumn in Paris.

The closing point of the exhibition is marked by the moment when Picasso begins to show that the lesson learnt from primitivism will convulse his pictorial structures and bring him to the search for new artistic parameters, as can be seen in *La Toilette*, *Nude on Red Background* and *Self-Portrait with Palette*, all of them painted in Paris, on his return from Gósol. It was the autumn of 1906. ■